



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Department of Toxic Substances Control

News Release

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California Takes Steps to Protect Workers from Toxic Chemical in Certain Paint Strippers

New regulation requires manufacturers to consider safer ingredients

SACRAMENTO – Starting January 1, 2019, manufacturers of paint and varnish strippers containing methylene chloride, a toxic chemical that has contributed to numerous deaths, will have to look for safer alternatives if they want to continue selling the products in California.

Under a new regulation, methylene chloride-based solvents will become a Priority Product under the Department of Toxic Substances Control's Safer Consumer Products program, which challenges manufacturers to remove toxic chemicals from common consumer goods.

"Methylene chloride is dangerous if it is not used correctly," said Meredith Williams, Deputy Director of DTSC's Safer Products and Workplaces Program. "We're taking these steps to protect the public by requiring businesses to look for safer ingredients."

Manufacturers who sell these types of solvents in California must notify DTSC by March 4, 2019. These notifications start the process of either finding a safer alternative or reformulating to eliminate methylene chloride from these products.

Methylene chloride in paint strippers can cause breathing problems and even heart failure when used in confined spaces and without a ventilator, and has been linked to increased risk of cancer. At least 56 people have died from unintentional

exposure to methylene chloride – many of them linked to paint stripping, according to the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit investigative journalism organization.

DTSC took this step, in part, because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has not finalized a 2017 proposal to ban these types of solvents.

Most paint and varnish stripping formulations sold in California contain methylene chloride, and it is estimated that one-third of all methylene chloride made worldwide is used as solvent in paint and varnish strippers.

Environmental, health and worker safety advocates have been pushing to restrict these products, and major retailers, such as Lowe's and Amazon, are increasingly pledging to stop selling them.

This action triggers a requirement that manufacturers conduct an extensive science-based evaluation of possible alternatives to methylene chloride. This [“alternatives analysis”](#) will cover each stage of a product's life cycle, and will help ensure that any replacement to methylene chloride is not a “regrettable substitute” – something that is just as bad or worse.

“It is important that consumers and businesses look for alternatives to methylene chloride, and to make sure those alternatives are safe,” Williams said. “Avoiding these regrettable substitutes is a key tenant of the Safer Consumer Products initiative and reduces the threat of exposure to harmful ingredients.”

DTSC will host a workshop on the alternatives analysis process on February 7, 2019, for industry and other stakeholders interested or affected by the new Priority Product regulation.

By requiring manufacturers to consider safer alternatives, the California regulation offers broader protections should a federal ban occur. DTSC has enforcement authority over companies that don't comply with the new regulation.

Although it is not part of this new regulation, DTSC also is considering adding other paint strippers that contain n-methylpyrrolidone (NMP) as a Priority Product. Because it is a reproductive and developmental toxicant, this chemical poses a threat to human health, particularly for pregnant women and women of childbearing age.

The methylene chloride solvents become DTSC's third Priority Product behind children's foam-padded sleeping products with flame retardants TDCPP or TCEP

that are developmental toxicants, and spray polyurethane foam containing unreacted methylene diphenyl-diisocyanates, which can cause asthma.

In addition, two other product-chemical combinations – carpets and rugs containing perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and laundry detergents containing nonylphenol ethoxylates, or NPEs – are being considered for regulation under the Safer Consumer Products initiative.

To learn more about DTSC’s Safer Consumer Products program visit our [website](#) or subscribe to the program’s [e-list](#) for email updates.

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FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES: Contact the Department of Toxic Substances Control by phone at (800) 728-6942 or visit www.dtsc.ca.gov. To report illegal handling, discharge, or disposal of hazardous waste, call the Waste Alert Hotline at (800) 698-6942.

The Mission of DTSC is to protect California’s people and environment from harmful effects of toxic substances by restoring contaminated properties, enforcing hazardous waste law, reducing hazardous waste generation, and encouraging the manufacture of chemically safer products.